

A CENTRALITY OF THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIETY

by

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C Abstract

Religion plays a central role in human life and civilisation. It is an independent force underlying the existence of society. This position invalidates the view of it being a mere dependent phenomenon of the historical forces, as held by some modern philosophers and social scientist. The centrality of religion in the society is clear from consideration of human being as a 'religious being in essence' and that of religion as a cosmic phenomenon governing man's thought and civilisation.¹ In view of the significance of religion in the society, this article attempts to establish its centrality in the society by analysing its significance, nature and the root cause of the controversy between religion and science. It also delineates some questions of metaphysical nature and highlights the inadequacy of mere reliance on senses and pure reason in the context hence, the need for divine guidance. The spiritual aspect of life and its constructive role in social phenomenon is also dealt with in this article.

F INTRODUCTION

Religion as a treasure of human values ensures society's sense of safety and security. It guards the society against disintegration and chaos. It is the religious instinct that strengthens an individual's sense of social responsibility. The sense of preservation of social values springs from an individual self to the core constituent element of what is religion. Thus, preservation of social values is due to the inner religious instinct rather than the external factor. Perceiving religion merely as a set of commands and prohibitions that hinders worldly enjoyment which holds back human progression in the direction of civilisation building is an erroneous thought. It is also erroneous to perceive religion as a set of rituals of individual concerns without any bearing of social element. In fact, religion plays a central role in human life and civilisation. It is an independent force underlying the existence of human society. It plays a marvellous role in shaping human behaviours and conducts and determines society's culture and civilisation.²

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- 1 Malek Bennabi, 1987, *Al-Zahirah Al-Quraniyyah* (4th Ed) Cairo at p 70.
 - 2 Mohamed Tahir El-Mesawi, 1998, *A Muslim Theory of Human Society*, Selangor, Thinker's Library Sdn Bhd at p 11.

RELIGION AND SOCIETY**A**

Every society has adhered to a form of religious life through out the history. This phenomenon has dominated human society from the very beginning of its existence. Thus, longevity or life span of religious phenomenon is a sufficient proof of its significance and importance in the human society. The perennial existence of religious phenomenon in a human's life is attested assertively by many philosophers, moralists and theologians. A comprehensive articulation of their views to this effect is beyond the scope and limit of this work, therefore, only a few of them will be analysed here. For example, the Greek philosopher and moralist Plutarch (46–120/27 AD) as observed by Izetbegovitch, has noted that 'We find cities without wall, kings, civilisation, literature or theatres, but never has man seen a city without place of worship or worshippers.'³ This testimony, of the classical philosopher of the second century of the Christian era, indorses the perennial existence of religion, the fact that underscores the centrality of the role of religion in earlier societies.

B**C****D**

The perennial existence of religion is not only indorsed by classical philosopher. Modern philosophers have also expressed their views to the same effect. They portrayed religion as a natural phenomenon of human life. The view of Henri Berson, a French philosopher is of particular relevance, for he expressed, in the same tone, the importance of religion stating, 'We find in the past, we could find today human societies without neither science, nor art nor philosophy, but there has never been a society without religion.'⁴ Furthermore, the perennial existence of religious phenomenon is expressed by social scientists as well. For instance, Durkhiem, Malinowski, Weber and Freud have also expressed, exceedingly in emphatic ways, similar views. They all agreed on the fact of 'religion being a characteristic of all human societies, past, present and future'. Based on their views, it can be concluded that the problem relating to religion is not a new one, but it is rather an eternal problem that preoccupies human mind. It is incontestably one of the earliest and most universal activities of human mind.⁵ Any attempt of excluding it from psychology dealing with the psychological structure of human personality, will have severe consequences, for it is of personal concern for individual, let alone its status as a sociological or historical phenomenon.⁶

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Consequently, the existence of religion as an objective phenomenon or reality is universally attested. It has accompanied mankind from the very beginning of his life in this world. However, despite the fact that it has been

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3 Cited in Alija Ali Izetbegovitch, 1989, *Islam Between East and West*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publications at p 16.

4 Henri Berson, 1978, *The Source of Morality and Religion*, tr by R Ashley Audra and Cloudesley, Brerton, Connecticut, Greenwood Press Publishers at p 92.

5 C Gustave Jung, 1966, *Psychology and Religion*, New Haven, Yale University Press at p 1.

6 *Ibid.*

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- A** the condition for social life throughout history, it is still contested in modern times. This controversy over religion and consequently over its relationship with science can be traced back to the dispute concerning the origin of religion, its nature and relationship with human being. Considering the perennial existence of religion in human society, such controversy indeed, can be seen as a dispute over the nature of human species itself. This is because all the views and interpretations concerning this matter in their final analysis can be traced to two principal questions: Are human beings religious by nature or acquires such quality through experience and culture? Modern western philosophers who view religious characteristic of human being in the latter sense, seeks to explain religion through a simple historical interpretation. Thus, it is placed in the same category of facts as disparate as pantheism, polytheism and monotheism.⁷ As a result, it isolates religion from its philosophical and metaphysical aspects, subsequently, denying the inherent religiosity of human nature.⁸

- D** Evidently, this extreme approach denies religion from being the central rule in the society and civilisation, under the assumption that reason and science, the driving forces of modernity, were able to fulfil its function. This is clear from Max Horkhiem's statement, 'the main effort of rationalist philosophy was to formulate a doctrine of man and nature that could fulfil the intellectual function, at least for the sophisticated sector of society that religion formerly fulfilled'.⁹ August Comte, the founding father of sociology, confirms the same position in the context of discussing his three-stage theory of human evolution. He advocates what he called the true religion of humanity whose 'positive priesthood is founded on the philosophical foundation of 'positive science' and which according to him would fulfil the material and spiritual needs of human society.¹⁰ Come by 'positive priesthood' in his theory of new religion means the class of the man of science and technological inventors.

- G** A closer examination of the controversy regarding the role and nature of religion reveals that it is a question of two competing systems, each claiming to present alternative solution to the problem of religion. However, the validity of such claim depends on the competitiveness of the system in presenting a solid solution. Viability of the system in such capacity is conditional on fulfilling certain criterion. It means once its fundamental principle is laid down, it must remain vigorously compatible with the system and its consequences must be coherent. This is the only scientific way to judge the rationale intrinsic value of a system and its relative value compared to the other.¹¹ This implies that a system should be capable of

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7 Malek Bennani, op cit at p 85.

8 Ernest Gelner, 1992, *Reason and Culture*, UK Oxford, Blackwell at pp 56–71.

9 Max Horkhiem, 1973, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York, Continuum at p 14.

10 See August Comte, 1975, *August Comte and Positivism; The Essential Writings*, edited by Gertrud, Lenzer, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press at pp 310, 384–388.

11 Malek Bennabi, op cit at p 71.

answering all relevant questions in a consistent and coherent manner, and fill the lacuna left by its competitor.¹²

The two contesting systems of thought, mentioned above, consist of physical and metaphysical systems, each having its own characteristics. The physical system considers matter as a determining factor in everything. On the other hand, metaphysical system regards the matter itself to be determined, hence, views religion as a cosmic fact and recognises it as an essential factor of all civilisation.¹³ This is due to religiosity being an inherent quality of human nature. It is a universal spiritual heritage, shared by human species and constitutes the collective unconscious.¹⁴ Thus, the controversy portraying science against religion is essentially a philosophical one, meaning that it is a question of two system of thought or two different visions of man, life and the universe. Since the physical system of thought axiomatically holds matter as the starting point of natural phenomenon, it characteristically denies its consideration as an eventuality. Such a consideration would nullify the very postulation of the system, due to its consequent presumption of the existence of an independent creative cause. Consideration of matter as the determining factor in everything naturally leads to concession that matter is not created; it simply exists in a certain quantity and a state of perfect homogeneity. Its existence in a perfect homogeneity is of particular importance as any differentiation would necessarily imply the intervention of heterogeneous factors, thus rendering it totally incompatible with one major quality of that original mass that is homogeneity.¹⁵

Thus, consideration of the origin of the matter as the principle of the existence in physical system of thought does not solve this problem. The evolution of matter or its successive state presents a bigger problem. This is because modern physics has demonstrated vigorously the heterogeneity of matter. The constituent element of the primary matter of the natural world exceeds hundreds as discovered by Dimitry Ivanovich Mendeleev and other chemists.¹⁶ Hence, one of the essential aspects of the hypothesis which is the condition of homogeneity is eliminated. Even if matter and its long chain of transmutations is granted, the concession of principle, the physical system of thought still has to answer many questions, specially, the one related to the human being.¹⁷

As a corollary of the fundamental principle of the physical system of thought, absolute originality of the matter and in line with the chain of transmutation, the primary quantity of matter is supposed to have undergone a long process of evolution. This process of transformation from the amorphous state of protoplasm to organised state of man presents some

¹² Al-Mesawi, Mohamed Tahir, op cit at pp 17, 18.

¹³ Malek Bennabi, op cit at pp 71, 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1987, *Milaad Mujtama'* (4th Ed) Cairo at p 68.

¹⁵ Malek Bennabi, op cit at p 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid* at p 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid* at p 76.

- A** more difficulties to physical materialistic system due to the limitation of its postulates. One of the major shortcomings of the system is that it does not take into consideration the phenomenon of animal reproduction. This in fact is a new problem concerning the unity of species, which cannot be viewed in the individual but only in the couple. This duality, which governs animal reproduction, cannot be justified according to the fundamental hypothesis of the system.¹⁸
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Even the assumption that it was due to biological accident that brought about the male, the materialist theorist will still have to answer the question regarding the female. Furthermore, admitting a double accident at the origin of the couple to explain the problem does not alleviate the problem,

- C** for it would be problematic to imagine that its result could have been so well coordinated relating to the reproductive function shared between the male and the female. In addition to the problem arising from the evolutionary conception, the physical system faces another problem at a different level. That is its opposition to what has been established by mechanics of matter's rigid control by the principle of inertia. The living matter is obviously not governed by this law, due to the possession of the faculty that enables it to modify its position by itself.¹⁹ This is truer in the case of human being, for he is the thinking living matter par excellence.
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Therefore, from the above mentioned difficulties of the physical system of thought and its high degree of incompatibility with materialistic determinism, it can be concluded that the fundamental principle of the system itself is not adequate to provide a coherent theory of the origin and evolution of matter.²⁰

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- The main factor of the inconsistency and incapability of the physical system of thought can be attributed to the very origin of all the confusion relating to the relationship between metaphysic and science. This confusion arises as a result of misunderstanding of scientism, which is most probably forgetful of the elemental principles of positive science itself.²¹ This is because; the positive science for its very existence depends on assumptions that cannot be proved by the methods and procedures of science itself. These assumptions or principles enjoy the taken for granted status in the realm of positive science. Even the most vigorous and precise science is not exception to this status of taken for granted.
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Numerous studies in the philosophy of science show that 'scientific activities presuppose a number of assertions about the nature of existence whose truth has to be acknowledged prior to any engagement in empirical studies'.²² Some of these assertions are of metaphysical nature and can be

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¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid* at p 71.

- I** ²² Louay M Safi, 1996, *Foundation of Knowledge: A Comparative Study in Islamic and Western Methods of Inquiry*, Malaysia, International Islamic University at p 148.

categorised as metaphysical postulates. Such as, the belief that ‘natural world is governed by laws which endow the behaviour of natural object and phenomenon with order and regularity, and that ‘the laws governing natural order are rational and hence, discernable by human rationality’.²³ This implies that ‘not only is the knowledge of the physical rooted in the metaphysical but also the latter is not altogether divorced from the former’.²⁴ Thus, it can be argued that the materialistic interpretation in certain sense is a metaphysical stand, for, science ‘cannot prove that God does not exist’²⁵ just as it cannot justify the existence of matter. Hence, materialism is as much a metaphysical belief as its seemingly more peculiar counterpart, idealism’.²⁶

Contrary to the physical system of thought, the metaphysical system of thought is based on a transcendent effective Cause. This effective Cause is God, the Prime Cause, who is ‘the Creator and Regulator of the universe’. Accordingly, the difficulty which the physical system of thought faces does not arise here. The metaphysical system of thought can easily provide the answer that matter ‘is created by determinism independent of all its properties’²⁷ which intervene whenever mere physical laws do not provide clear explanation of the phenomenon. Thus, the metaphysical system is not only immune to the inconsistencies and contradiction of physical materialistic system, it is rather perfectly in accord with the philosophical requirement of the human mind, which pursue to establish the link between things and phenomena in a logical and coherent manner. Furthermore, it ‘lays down beyond matter, a bridge towards an ideal of moral perfection ... human ultimate end’.²⁸

Admittedly, metaphysical system of thought, having a transcendent effective cause as its base, is able to resolve the problem of the origin of matter. It considers matter to be created in accordance with the imperative order of a supreme will. Thus, it answers the question of the evolution of the matter by asserting that it ‘would be regulated by an intelligence which assures equilibrium and harmony and whose unchanging laws human science can establish. Obviously, some of the stages of evolution of matter may skip the scientist’s observation thus, resulting in some deficiency to the physical system. However, metaphysical system does not encounter such problem due to being immune from deficiency in this context because it is able to explain the problem in a coherent manner by referring to the notion of the metaphysical determinism on the basis of the intervention of a creative, conscious and voluntary cause. Possibility of failure of human science in discovering the law that governs certain phenomenon may not be

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Malek Bennabi, op cit at p 71.

²⁶ Clarke, J, 1992, *In Search of Jung*, New York, Routledge at p 33.

²⁷ Malek Bennabi, op cit at p 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

- A** discounted. However, the metaphysical system is not prone to such fallacy. It is able to explain and justify such phenomenon by resorting to an absolute determinism and yet maintaining its logicality and coherence.²⁹ Thus, from the above discussion it becomes clear that the presumed opposition between religion and science is due to the misunderstanding of their meaning and scope. This is especially true with regard to the questions
- B** concerning the issues of metaphysical nature that are common to religion, philosophy and civilisation.

QUESTIONS OF METAPHYSICAL NATURE

- C** Origin of the universe, man and the purpose of creation constitute the basic themes that are common to religion, philosophy and civilisation. These themes are dealt with through the articulation of certain questions such as what is the beginning and the end of this universe. Who is its Creator and what are His attributes? What is the relation between men and Him, and is there any measuring yard of an ethical code in the universe beside the
- D** physical law, and what is the position of man in this cosmic order? These questions lay at the very core of every system of thought or religion and cannot be ignored at any cost. Thus, humankind cannot solve the problem of life and chalk out an outline of civilised social existence without finding answers to these questions. In fact, as Ali Nadwi held, all subjective and objective manifestations of any civilisation, its social order, ethical codes, laws, politics and philosophy reflect the basic concepts of its people in relation to these questions.³⁰
- E**

- F** These questions are of perennial nature and spring from human consciousness. They dominated human mind and thought through out the history and played a significant role in the development of the philosophy, way of life and the evolution of the culture. Having established the commonality of these questions to religion, philosophy and civilisation it is in order to elaborate on the means of knowledge and to examine the scope of their operation and the extent reliability in the context.

G SENSES PERCEPTION

- H** Sensory organs being the greatest source of acquisition of certain forms of knowledge represent the first means of knowledge. It is through the reaction of the sensory organs that human being perceives his external environment and forms his perception of the physical world. In fact, the discovering of this world and the derivation of its benefits is made possible through the senses. Furthermore, many of the physical laws that govern physical world are discovered through the senses. In sum, human being accumulates a vast

I ²⁹ *Ibid* at p 80.

³⁰ Abulhassan Ali Nadwi, 1979, *Religion and Civilization*, tr by Muhiuddin Ahmad, India, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications at p 12.

treasure of observation, experiences, and perception through these sensory organs.

Undeniably, humankind is endowed with senses, which serve practical ends. However, this should not be taken as a free ticket to empower them to reveal the nature of things. This is due to the unreliability of the knowledge acquired through the senses as pointed out by philosophers. For example, Nicolas Malebranche highlights the failure of senses in revealing the true nature of things (1638–1715) as he states: ‘the main reason for our mistake in this regard is the erroneous belief that the senses which have been given to us to serve practical ends, are also capable of revealing to us the nature of things.’³¹ Another philosopher, Micheal De Montaigne (1533–1592) has commented on the same issue to the same effect. Viewing human knowledge extremely imperfect, he states that man and his senses are uncertain and prone to error. Therefore, one can never be sure of what is imparted by them is always true for, they merely show us the world as conditioned by our own nature and circumstances.³² As such, they do not discern the external objects but only the condition of the sense organs which appear to us in a sensual perception.

The unreliability of the senses perception is due to its limited capacity which renders it incapable of leading to an accurate knowledge. To underscore this, question of where man comes from and where has he got to go is relevant. In other words, where is the beginning and the end of cosmic world? Sense perception is incapable of answering these questions of metaphysical nature. For, if we were to refer to our eyes, ears, hands and tongue in order to answer these questions the answer will be where we presently are. Thus, the scope of the senses perception is limited and cannot go beyond the immediate physical environment. One cannot see or hear beyond certain range while other sensory organs suffer from ever-greater limitation. They cannot confirm or deny anything beyond the scope of their operation. The most, they can do is to deny having perceived something but not to deny its existence.³³

Similarly, human sensory organs fail to perceive reality of cosmos in its true nature since they can only comprehend different objects and perceives their reality partially. Grasping the prevalent inner harmony that exists between them as a whole is beyond their scope of operation. Furthermore, the essence of the power behind the well-balanced cosmic order cannot be conceived by methodological equipment of human senses. Only a part of physical laws that governs this universe is perceivable through their effect which our senses experiences. For example, one knows that fire burns, water quench thirst and poison kills. But the experience of moral behaviour being of entirely different nature, cannot be perceived by senses. In the

31 Herold Hoffdring, 1924, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, Vol I, London at p 248.

32 *Ibid* at p 28.

33 Abulhasan Ali Nadwi, *op cit*.

- A** same manner, the effect of heat is perceivable by sense perception. But the harm inflicted by cruelty, falsehood and misappropriation cannot be discovered by senses. Therefore, to facilitate an experience of the effect of moral behaviour, one needs an ethical intuition, religious faith and a feeling of spiritual security.³⁴
- B** From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that perception and existence are two different things. It means one's failure to conceive something by his senses does not necessitate its non-existence. An attitude of refusing things on the ground of it not being actually perceivable by senses totally demolishes the distinction between man and animal and renders all the treasure of knowledge meaningless. Moreover, the
- C** perception of reality based on mere reliance on sensorial organs leads to the conception of satisfaction of human desire as the ultimate purpose of life. Such a conclusion is only natural and inevitable consequences of sole reliance on the functioning of sensory organs. Therefore, sense perception in isolation does not stand its ground as a valid source of knowledge. It
- D** needs the assistance of another means in the light of which it can be guided.

INTELLECT

- E** An impartial and rational evaluation of reason reveals that it cannot operate independently. It depends on 'accumulating, processing, deducing knowledge and experience'³⁵ which are basically provided by sense perceptions. Therefore, rational thought in its initial stage is simple sensorial perceptions and observations stored up in the mind and processed by it in order to arrive at a particular conclusion. Thus, the faculty of reason
- F** heavily depends on sensorial perception for drawing its conclusions. Without senses, it becomes helpless and resembles a man who wants to cross an ocean without a ship or flying without an aeroplane.³⁶ Thus, human reason by itself cannot solve the problems of metaphysical nature without reference to revelation, due to being, beyond its reach and perception.
- G** Consequently, a truly rational course for the intellect with regards to metaphysical issues is to take impartial attitude like sensory organs and declare that it is neither capable of proving or comprehending anything, nor has it a right to deny anything solely on the ground of its own limitation. Ali Nadwi has rightly observed the deficiency of intellect by comparing it to the
- H** state of a blind person who cannot see things despite their existence. He observes 'A blind man has no right to deny the observations of anyone simply because he cannot see the thing himself. He can, at most, deny of

³⁴ *Ibid.*

I ³⁵ IIIT, 1989, *Islamization of Knowledge; General Principles and Work Plan*, Virginia, USA, IIIT at p 52.

³⁶ Abulhasan Ali, Nadwi, op cit at pp 18–20.

having himself seen the thing described but he has no right to affirm or deny it'.³⁷ **A**

Despite all this, the inquisitive nature of intellect always strives to grasp these problems by means of imagination, reason and speculation. This is known as philosophy. The philosophers do not only indulge themselves with questions regarding God, His attributes, His Omnipotence, man's relation with his Creator, the means of His comprehension, the beginning and the end of the cosmos, life after death and other metaphysical issues, but also provide detailed descriptions of the metaphysical realities on the patterns of tangible objects.³⁸ **B**

Al-Ghazali, bearing in mind the limits of intellect, criticised philosophers for their sole reliance on it in dealing with issues of metaphysical nature. He has repeatedly pointed out in his books that, unlike physical and mathematical sciences, the metaphysical premise of philosophy is only a concept which is drawn on the basis of idea and imagination without inquiry and credence.³⁹ The reason why metaphysical issues remain beyond the scope of the comprehension of intellect is that our perception is created and cannot comprehend the vast range of beings. God's creation, being broader than that of man's, means that it is beyond man's range of comprehension. He alone comprehends all. **C**

However, the foregoing discussion, does not imply the invalidity of mind as an accurate scale whose recordings are certain and reliable. However, to use it to weigh questions relating to the Unity of God, or the life in the Hereafter, or the nature of prophecy, or the divine qualities, is like using a goldsmith's scale to weigh mountain which is impossible, not due to inaccuracy of the scale, but to its limitation. Likewise, a mind has its limits and its operation is confined rigidly to that limit.⁴⁰ Therefore, it cannot comprehend God and His qualities without divine revelation, for the mind itself is one of the many atoms created by God. **D**

Like al-Ghazali, Emmanuel Kant, a German philosopher, detecting the deficiency of intellect, criticised it strongly and considered it not effective in reaching the knowledge of God.⁴¹ By doing this, to say it in Iqbal's words, 'Kant rendered the whole work of rationalist to a heap of ruins'.⁴² Thus, from his view, it becomes clear that intellect by itself is incapable of providing accurate answers to the metaphysical realities and problems. Therefore, a different means of knowledge that combines both reason and revelation within its framework is required. **E**

³⁷ *Ibid* at p 20. **F**

³⁸ *Ibid*. **G**

³⁹ *Ibid*. **H**

⁴⁰ See Charles, Issawi, 1950, *An Arab Philosophy of History*, London at pp 165, 166. **I**

⁴¹ Seyyed Hossein, Nasr, 1994, *A Young Muslim Guide to The Modern World*, Petaling Jaya Malaysia, Mekar Publisher at p 166.

⁴² Muhammad Iqbal, 1934, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, London, Oxford University Press at p 5.

- A** Dialectics, a branch of philosophy, evolved for the defence of religion, challenged philosophy by means and methodology of philosophy itself to prove the existence of God, His attributes and other theological metaphysical problems through reason. Dialectician, as religious philosophers while discussing metaphysical problems like the philosophers, too, forgot the limitation of sensory perception and intellect without realising their mistake for hundreds of years.⁴³ A shining example, of this group is *mu'tazilah*, who were overwhelmingly fascinated by the capability of the intellect. Disregarding the limitation of reason completely, they discussed the metaphysical realities to the extent of conceiving God on the pattern of man and the Hereafter on the basis of existing world. They also
- C** conceived the attributes of God on the pattern of observable things assuming the perceptibility, dimension, time, space, cause and effect as the essential ingredients of every existence.⁴⁴ Thus, a person recognising the limits of intellect does not tend to overstep its range of operation and subject God to human laws on the ground of their applicability to man.
- D** Consequently, a society, which considers sensory impression as a necessary condition for the acceptance of any existence, obviously rejects any reality, which is beyond human perception. The consequences of such a stand are the denial of the Hereafter, the life after death and consideration of worldly life as the end by itself. Thus, the demand for making the best of present life becomes indisputable, rationally and intellectually. Making the
- E** worldly life more comfortable becomes the sole purpose of life. Self-interest, but not abstract morality becomes the driving force of individual's behaviour in this type of society. Epicurean's ideal which emphasises pleasure and sensual enjoyment, becomes the basis of the society's moral system. As the society advances further, the ideal changes from pleasure to utility ie the moral law of the society aims at the greater good of the greatest
- F** number, pleasure and enjoyment while still providing its undercurrent.⁴⁵
- Consequently, undue reliance on senses, impressions and intellect may lead the society to prefer immediate benefit over ultimate gain, due to the proximity of the former to the sensory cognition. Thus, its civilisation is built on a shallow basis and its social behaviour is marked by individualism, selfishness and profit motive. The mentality of its individual members is dominated by exaltation of material gains over principles, moral and faith. No matter how lofty the principles or ideologies, ethical or moral codes and articles of faith there may be, they can be discarded at the altar of meanest profit and smallest gain.⁴⁶ Therefore, people who acquire such an outlook
- G** of life and attitude are always prepared to compromise with any system and work for any ideology and fight under any flag as long as they have something to gain. This is so as they lack a permanent standard of morality.
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43 Abulhasan Ali, Nadwi, op cit at p 26.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid* at p 46.

46 *Ibid.*

'Utility and the greatest happiness of the greatest number'⁴⁷ to them is the only criterion of the morality of the acts. The implication of such a utilitarian outlook is that man is physiologically an animal albeit of a higher species. That is the main reason why sociologists, in their study of men, focuses on his material aspect and ignores his spiritual existence.

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that human efforts to solve metaphysical problems by means of senses and intellect only are futile. The social order which evolves wholly on the foundation of human experience is defective. Therefore, a different source of knowledge which can provide authentic and reliable answers to metaphysical problems is required. We cannot afford ignoring metaphysical problems, for, such act is embedded with significant consequences. When we observe the vastness of the universe and the order that prevails in the movement of its component elements, it is difficult to presume that the whole system came into existence by itself without a Creator. In the same manner, it is not logical to assume human life as purposeless and likening himself to insects and beasts without any guidance⁴⁸ since human's own capabilities is inadequate to solve the metaphysical problems and therefore a divine guidance is needed.

DIVINE GUIDANCE

Accordingly, God the Almighty has sent many Prophets at different times throughout history who were of good character and high honour. They were chosen by God to deliver His message to mankind and teach them what they do not know or unable to know by their own means, sensory organs and intellect. They provided the answers to questions concerning the metaphysical realities and guided humanity to the straight path of God.⁴⁹ Their goal was to serve God and to establish truth and goodness by acquainting man with God and His divine teachings. They helped human beings to realise the purpose of their existence and conducts of his life. Their knowledge of reality is certain and true and is unparalleled by the discovery of senses and intellect.⁵⁰

The Prophets presented a well-knit order of morals, worship and social relation. The world had not witnessed a social order better than that taught by them. Thus, those who accepted their message and followed what they ordained became superior to their contemporaries in moral conduct, disposition and behaviour. Goodness, truthfulness, charity, humility and sincerity became the hallmark of their character. Unlike the differing theories and contradicting postulates of the philosophers, the message of

47 Muhammad Muslehuddin, 1977, *Sociology and Islam*, Lahore, Islamic Publication Limited at p 171.

48 Abulhasan Ali, Nadwi, op cit at p 73.

49 Hammudah Abdalati, 1978, *Islam in Focus*, Kuwait, The International Islamic Federation of Student Organization at p 31.

50 Abulhasan Ali Nadwi, op cit at p 77.

- A** the Prophets has always been one and the same is void of any incompatibility and discrepancy.⁵¹

Accordingly, the social order, which is based on divine revelation take cognition of the purposive nature of creation and universe. The pattern of its intellectual, social, moral, economic and political order is drawn on the

- B** basis of the premise that the universe is ruled and administered by the Lord, the Only Creator and Sustainer, to whom belongs whatever exists in the universe and nothing shall happen without his knowledge and will. The whole universe submits to His will and His order, therefore, man, as a creation endowed with free will should follow suit and submit willingly to the Supreme Authority.⁵² This implies the unity of creation, the unity
- C** between the conceptual world and thought, attitude and behaviour of human being, for they are created by God and to Him all shall return.

Accountability to God constitutes the spiritual dynamic of the society, which is based on the revelatory principles. It plays a significant role in influencing the attitude and behaviour of its members. The idea of human independence, which is the main cause of His deviation, has no place in this type of society. It is replaced by a sense of responsibility to the effect of which one regards all the capabilities given to him by God as a valuable trust, and fear of using them for any purpose which is not in accordance to the will of the Creator. In other words, the realisation of moral responsibility to the Sovereign of the universe makes human being obey Him willingly.

- E** Thus, the realisation of the purposiveness of the universe and man's dependence on God are the determining factors of the worth of life itself⁵³ for, it is on the basis of this realisation that one sees life as valuable and utilises it for the preparation of eternal life in the Hereafter and does not waste it in the pursuit of pleasure.

- F** Obviously, an individual of such characteristics does not exploit the values of material welfare and does not turn the world into hostile groups due to his craze for power and pleasure, as it is the case with the present scenario of world politics. He would rather lead a life as temperate and chaste as would be envied by the saints and ascetics. Furthermore, he shows extreme honesty and trustworthiness in his conduct due to his strong
- G** conviction that the Omniscient Lord Himself will judge each and every act of his. Thus, this sense of responsibility would never allow him to sink to the level of beasts, nor could he be cruel to his fellow beings, exploiting them for his own ends and benefits,⁵⁴ hence, holding human dignity in high esteem.

- H** Similarly, he would stick to the ethical principles provided by the revelation and would not compromise on it for, it provides him with a whole perspective of cosmic relationship, his place in creation and the laws

⁵¹ *Ibid* at p 86.

I ⁵² *Ibid* at p 95.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* at p 101.

governing his social relationship, which are of significance in guiding his conduct and the realisation of the purpose of life.⁵⁵ His mind is built in such a way that takes pleasure in doing good to others.⁵⁶ He will never give up what is right and just for the sake of anyone, friend or foe, nor would he discriminate anyone on the basis of his appearance, race, country, language or kinship. He helps others in virtue and justice alone.⁵⁷ A society whose individual member is in possession of such quality is, an integrated society and is free from partisanship and favouritism to any tribe, nation or party, justice dominate all sphere of its social relation.

Consequently, the social order, which is based on the revelatory principle, is void of extremism. It takes the middle path and has no place for monasticism or asceticism. It forbids annihilation of the self, and celibacy, living in seclusion far from society and unnatural penance. Such activities are foreign to its outlook. It does not assign any value to prayer and penance in an abandoned cave but rather sees it in the remembrance of God and in the hustle and bustle of daily life.

In a nutshell, the social order, which is based on revelatory principles, is stable. Its ethical code of behaviour and criterion of differentiation between right and wrong never change. The standard of its judgment remains the same and does not undergo any change. No amount of rationalisation or gain can change the essential postulation of its ethical code. Therefore, what is commendable for it shall ever remain so while that which what is prohibited will always be rejected. This is so because the standard of its moral behaviour is divine in nature and not instinctive, or human inclined, or anything decipherable by human intellect. These all are changeable and cannot be regarded as criterion for the fundamental canons of human morality.

In contrast to social order based on religion, other social orders which are purely based on speculative thought and intellectual apprehension do not have permanent standards of morality. They adopt an attitude of moral relativism or moral fluidity hence, resulting in moral confusion among their adherents as could be witnessed during Greek and Roman period, even in the present day of Europe and America. The reason for this confusion is the total disregard of the spiritual aspect of human life, which has profound bearings on human social behaviour.

SPIRITUAL DOMAIN OF LIFE

The spiritual aspect of human life plays a crucial role in maintenance of the most genuine and creative rapport with archetypes or master ideas, which are responsible for the genesis of society. It provides the best spiritual strain and ethical sensitivities hence, guiding individual members in carrying out

⁵⁵ IIIT, *Islamization of Knowledge* at p 52.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Muslehuddin, op cit at p 230.

⁵⁷ Abulhasan Ali Nadwi, op cit at p 102.

A the most sublime acts of austerity, sacrifices and altruism. Moreover, it enables every member of the society to transcend his egoistic concerns and aspirations. It is for this reason that society owes its historical continuity, to the main thrust imported by its religio-spiritual character, hence, projecting it from nothingness on to the stage of the history.⁵⁸

B To elucidate the significance of spiritual aspect of social life, Malek Bennabi's theory of three stages of the development of society is of relevance. According to Bennabi, society undergoes three different phases of development; spiritual, rational and instinctual. This naturally occurs in line with the stages of socio-cultural development of society. In the spiritual stage, those presenting as role models play decisive role. They control the vital energies of individual members of society and bring them under the total control of the spiritual consideration. Thus, individuals within the framework of concerted action are totally oriented to society's ideal. All the psycho-social and material forces of the society at this stage are organised in such a way that enables society to deal with its problems successfully by limiting its need on the one hand, and making use of its means to fulfil those needs on the largest possible scale, on the other.⁵⁹

C Spiritual and ethical orientation of the society and the centrality of ideas in its structure endow it with an upward vertical development corresponding to the high level of density in its social relation, and the most favourable conditions that mould individual's response in the most efficient way and her energy is in its best state of organisation and orientation.⁶⁰ It is for this reason that this stage is considered as the golden age of the society. The two main characteristics of this stage of development of society are dynamism and movement on an ascending forward direction. Thus, ideas and values derived from divine religion, as the constituent elements of the cultural world of the society function as a reminding force, that check psycho-social and material forces, and prevent them from deviation hence, keeping social vacuum to its minimum level.⁶¹

E From the above discussion it becomes clear that the spiritual phase of the society's development is the stage where its' vital energies are totally subordinated to the logic and law of the soul and its archetype ideals constitute the centre of gravity for the individual action and behaviour.

F The rational phase represents the second stage of the development of society. It manifests itself in a descending order. Its symptom is the recession of the soul in favour of reason and intellect. At this stage, the role of the soul is reduced and intellect and reason assume a predominant role in the direction of the social evolution. As a result of the dominance of reason, part of the society's forces stop functioning at all and slid into

58 Malek Bennabi, 1994, *The Problems of Ideas in the Muslim World*, tr by Mohamed Tahir al-Mesawi, Petaling Jaya, Dewan Pustaka Islam at pp 28, 32.

I 59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*

61 Malek Bennabi, *Milad Mujtama'* at p 77.

apathy and idleness. Some of these forces turn into the forces of obstruction, if not destruction, of the development of the society and its existence. As a consequence of the lack of control over individual, a part of those energies evades the already established mechanism of conditioned response by religious ideals at the very out set of the cycle.⁶²

This leads to the weakening of the position of the archetypal ideal as the sole centre of gravity and polarisation of society's psycho- sociological forces and energies. Hence, a conflict between the realm of ideas and object over the power of attraction and control for individual vital energy emerges.⁶³ This generates the idea-object duel in society's cultural world which gradually leads to the tripartite conflict between the person, the object and ideas, with ideas losing its ground in the cultural universe of the society.⁶⁴

As the development course of the society changes from vertical line to horizontal one in a rational phase, it adversely affects spiritual strain and ethical sensitivity, hence, resulting in an alarming level of social vacuum in the form of breakdowns in the social relation network.⁶⁵ Social relation suffers recession as a result of growing inefficiency of religious idealists and an increasing degree of apathy in all spheres of human social action and behaviour. Regulatory function that the mechanism of reciprocity and mutual dependency practised among the individual members of the society can no longer be maintained.⁶⁶

The third stage of the development of the society is represented by the instinctual phase, where the individual's vital energies achieve total independence from the control of ideas. In such circumstances, the social network loses its ability to support any concerted actions integrating the three different realms of the society, namely; person, ideas and object, into a coherent and dynamic whole. As a result of this three-pronged conflict a sheer despotism of either the persons or the objects, if not both at the same time, emerges. This leads to the dominance of personality cult and thingness mentality in social life and culture.⁶⁷ The impact of personality cult and thingness mentality is that values are disregarded in social system and the civilisation it builds is shallow as it lacks depth and breath. As a result, society drifts from subscription to ideas and gets involved in the pursuit of idols.⁶⁸

It is therefore, not the material and structural aspect of human social existence that is responsible for the emergence of personification and thingness mentality. However, it is rather the psychological order of the society which is traceable to the realm of person itself. Total liberation of

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Malek Bennabi, *Problem of Ideas* at pp 28–32.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* at p 6984.

⁶⁵ Malek Bennabi, *Milad Mujtama'* at pp 42, 43.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 1984, *Shurut al-Nahdah* (4th Ed) Cairo at pp 76, 77.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, *Problem of Ideas* at pp 62–75.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, *Shurut al-Nahdah* at pp 30–40.

- A** individual's vital energies, eg instinct and natural impulses, from the control of both soul and intellect, brings about a reverse transformation in the realm of persons. This leads to the emergence of self gratification and conceit at all level of society, hence, its disintegration. Individuals emerge as an atom in an already weary social body, and the society cannot carry out any effective collective action in history. In such a situation neither society is
- B** capable of undertaking any constructive collective action, nor are the mental efforts of individual in position to solve the problem it faces.⁶⁹ Thus, society is experiencing socio-dramatic situation in which the social structures, institutions and organisational patterns, are deprived of the support of ideas and seem to be doomed to disappearance. From these all
- C** it becomes clear that psychological factor proceeds and condition the sociological factor in accordance with the fundamental 'bio-historical' principle of human civilisation formulated by the Quran:

Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves with their own soul.⁷⁰

- D** In the same manner, the political and economical factors of changes in the society are psychological in nature.⁷¹ In fact, all changes in different spheres of human social life are the outcome of the metaphysical forces and the alteration that takes place at the spiritual level of the society. Thus, the cyclical conception of socio-historical change, as Bennabi holds; '... consists of successive cycle, coming about ... and ending as the earth gravity triumph over both the soul and the intellect'.⁷²
- E**

It is in recognition of the precedence and conditioning power of the psychological factors over other in social relation that Islam starts with human spiritual nourishment. This is in order to build a normative and ideational human pattern based on which a comprehensive normative framework for individual and society can be drawn. As such, it can provide guidance for his thoughts and actions, for education and practice and for knowledge and organisation of this world and the world to come.⁷³

F

G CONCLUSION

G

Religion plays an important role in human life. It is an independent force that forms society and determines its culture and civilisation. Its centrality in society is clear from its perennial existence in human life from the very beginning of His creation. As such, it is an universally-attested phenomenon. Classical and modern philosophers and moralists as well as

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⁶⁹ *Ibid*, *Milad Mujtama'* at p 43.

⁷⁰ Surah *al-Rad* (13):11.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, *Problems of Ideas* at pp 127, 131.

I ⁷² *Shurut al-Nahdah*, *ibid* at p 59.

⁷³ Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, 1989, *Islamization of Knowledge in Islamization of Knowledge; General Principles and Work Plan*, Herdon VA, IIT at p 84.

social scientists agreed on the perennial existence of religion and the fact that it preoccupied human mind throughout the history. Thus, dispute over the relation between religion and science is due to the misunderstanding of their meaning and scope. In fact, this can be recognised as a dispute over the nature of human being itself. All the views and interpretations regarding this matter in their final analysis can be traced to two principal issues of whether man is a religious being or homo religious by nature, or has acquired religion through a sort of cultural accident. These two issues have a strong bearing on the understanding of religion and its interpretation and evaluation. Modern philosophers explaining religion in isolation from its metaphysical and philosophical aspect, put it in the same category of facts such as pantheism, polytheism and monotheism. Religion provides formidable source of knowledge as regards to the purpose of creation, its origin, and the position of man in the universe. Senses perception or intellect in isolation from revelation cannot provide reliable answer to the perplexed problems of metaphysical nature. Their incapability to perceive the metaphysical reality does not mean it is non-existent, for perception and existence are two different things.

Accordingly, Islam as a divine religion provides solution to all problems of metaphysical nature. Therefore, it furnishes humanity with the right perception of the universe, the Creator and the purpose of life. It facilitates the formation of society whose ethical code of behaviour and criterion of discrimination of right and wrong never change. This is because the divine guidance endows it exclusively with ideas and values that function as reminding forces hence, preventing its members from deviation. These values and ideas constitute the spiritual aspect of the social life which plays significant role in controlling the vital energies of the members of society and subordinating them to the logic of the law of the soul. In view of the conditioning power of spiritual aspect, in human social relation, Islam draws a social system based on certain conceptual framework and practical measures that provide for all aspects of human life. Hence, religion is of immense importance in human life.

A**B****C****D****E****F****G****H****I**